

Strawberry Fields Forever

BY LOYCE MARTINAZZI

Ah, summertime, when the livin' is easy, and the berries are sensual: ripe, fragrant, luscious, and dripping with sweet purple and red juice. Willamette Valley's rich alluvial soils and climate are especially suited to growing berries of all kinds.

While wild strawberries were grown from ancient times, the garden variety, a cross of *Fragaria virginiana* from North America, and *Fragaria chiloensis* from Chile were first bred in Brittany in the 1750s.

But it was in 1890 that Marshall F. Ewell developed the strawberry that was to dominate the market until the 1960s. The Marshall, as it was called, was a perfect berry, so perfectly flavored that James Beard, father of American gastronomy pronounced the Marshall the tastiest berry ever grown.

During the 1920s, 30s, 40s and 50s acre upon acre of the Tualatin and Willamette valleys were covered with Marshall strawberries. Processing plants sprung up to handle the harvest and receiving stations were available so farmers wouldn't have to drive so far to deliver the crop.

Berries were hand picked by people of all ages. Entire families would camp out and pick, earning money that was badly needed, especially during the depression. Processors paid maybe 1 and ½ cents a pound and paid pickers ½ cents per pound. Wooden carriers held six hallocks or wooden boxes, which were transferred into wooden crates holding 12 boxes. Besides pickers, row bosses were needed as well as boys or men to carry the crates and load them on trucks. Later, plastic crates were used and of course, prices rose. Schaber Brothers had a large strawberry farm on Borland Road, with never a weed to be seen.

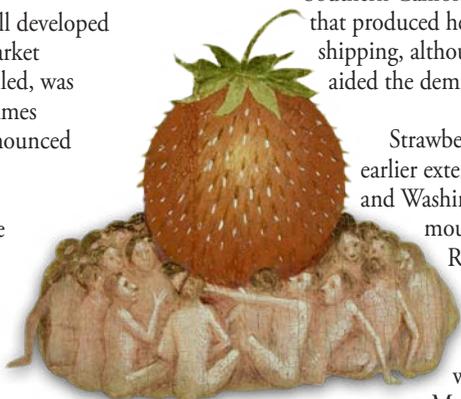
Packing houses, like Portland Canning Company in Sherwood, Chandler in Tigard, Bird's Eye, and others also hired people to help process the fruit, which was frozen into large cans and shipped out to preservers to make jams, jellies, ice cream, syrups.

The Dickinson family of Oswego built a huge preserving business, starting out with preserves made in their kitchen. Walter Dickinson married Dorothy Byrom (yes, from our Byrom family) and they grew berries, including black caps or black raspberries on their Tualatin property. Soon Dickinsons preserves were known all over the country for

their fine product. The same family still produces preserves from the same recipe under the Glenmore Farms label.

Then the boom fell. The Marshall strawberry fell prey to a vicious virus, red stele. Entire fields withered and the times, they were a-changing. Oregon State College experiment station came up with a new strawberry: the Northwest. Not nearly as flavorful as the Marshall, the Northwest produced several more tons per acre, and was not susceptible to the Red Stele virus. It was also firmer than the Marshall and held up better in shipping.

Southern California had developed a strawberry variety that produced heavy tonnage, was firm and held up in shipping, although lacking in flavor, the California berries aided the demise of the strawberry culture in Oregon.



From *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1480-1505.

Strawberries are still grown here, but not to the earlier extent. New varieties developed by Oregon and Washington include several that are named for mountains in the Cascade Range. Hood, Rainier, Shucksun, Lassen, Shasta and others. The Benton was developed in Corvallis. From the USDA's germplasm repository in Corvallis, three Marshall strawberry plants were saved and the runners planted, so the Marshall strawberry is not gone altogether.

The Marion cultivar of blackberry has been a crowning achievement of the Oregon State Experiment Station in Aurora. A cross between the Chehalem (Himalayan) and the Olallie (wild mountain blackberry) is beyond all doubt the finest blackberry ever produced. The Willamette variety of red raspberry is a tasty firm high producing berry. Other caneberrys include Logan, Boysen, and Tayberries. Grown to a lesser extent are black raspberries which are grown for ice cream flavoring as well as dye, and of course, the very popular blueberry.

Strawberries are the first to ripen, followed by raspberries, and then the others. Ask me sometime why I know so much about berries.



Loyce Martinazzi was born and raised in Tualatin and is passionate about Tualatin History. She is currently Lecturer of the Winona Grange, Co-Founder of the Tualatin Historical Society and Co-Author of *Tualatin...From the Beginning*.



These kids are picking the Northwest variety of strawberry. Tickets were punched for each full carrier. The berries were hauled to Portland Canning Company in Sherwood for processing.



Tualatin girls picking strawberries on the Helms Farm along Sagert Road in 1952. Left to right: Kathleen Milan, Rosanne Harr, Dolores Milan, Ruth Hansen.

